

# The Wedding of Keren Witkin & Neal Freedman!

Lanesboro, Massachusetts October 10, 2004

## Opening/invocation

*Bruchim haba'im*: blessed are you who have come together today to celebrate this happy occasion. We have gathered together to celebrate the wedding of Keren and Neal, the twining-together of two lives and two families. These two stories had separate beginnings, but from today forward they form one narrative, the story of Neal and Keren, of which we are all a part.

At this time of great joy, Keren and Neal would like us to pause for a moment of silence to honor and remember their departed loved ones whose spirit is with us as we celebrate today.

## Reading

Neal's grandmother Peggy would like to begin by reading from a Helen Hunt Jackson poem, "October's Bright Blue Weather."

### *October's Bright Blue Weather*

O suns and skies and clouds of June,  
And flowers of June together,  
Ye cannot rival for one hour  
October's bright blue weather;

When loud the bumble-bee makes haste,  
Belated, thriftless vagrant,  
And Golden-Rod is dying fast,  
And lanes with grapes are fragrant;

When Gentians roll their fringes tight  
To save them for the morning,  
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs  
Without a sound of warning;

When on the ground red apples lie  
In piles like jewels shining,  
And redder still on old stone walls  
Are leaves of woodbine twining....

When comrades seek sweet country haunts,  
By twos and twos together,  
And count like misers, hour by hour,  
October's bright blue weather.

O suns and skies and flowers of June,  
Count all your boasts together,  
Love loveth best of all the year  
October's bright blue weather.

### **Blessing of the wine**

In Judaism, wine is a symbol of joy. We bless wine at every festive occasion, to remind ourselves that life is sweet and that we sanctify our days by celebrating what is joyful.

*N'varech et ayn ha-chayyim, matzmichat p'ri hagafen.*

Let us bless the Source of Life that ripens the fruit of the vine.

*[Neal/Keren sip from goblet]*

### **Reading**

I'd like to invite Neal's Grandmother Anne to come up and read "Children," by Kahlil Gibran.

*Children*

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you.  
And though they are with you they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love, but not your thoughts,  
for they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies, but not their spirits,  
for their spirits dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you can not visit, but only in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backwards nor tarries with yesterday.  
Your children are reaching toward tomorrow.  
Bless them with your love, faith and traditions.  
Teach them by your example.  
Stengthen them with your encouragement, and then...let them live. —Kahlil Gibran

## Homily

So here we are, under your beautiful chuppah in one of the most beautiful spots on earth, celebrating the two of you and your good fortune—or good wisdom—in finding and choosing each other. Take a deep breath; center yourselves in the moment; notice how it feels to be right here, right now. The caterer isn't your problem anymore. The guest list isn't your problem anymore. All of the things you may or may not be able to control about today aren't your problem anymore. Your job now is to relax and enjoy the moment.

Today comes after a lot of planning and hard work. In the weeks leading up to a wedding, it's easy to think, "Man, I can't wait for it to happen so we can get on with our lives." There's some merit to that. In a way, it's what we're here for! We are gathered here today to celebrate your intent to "get on with your lives," and to do it together. This isn't an ending; it's a beginning. As much fun as a wedding is, it doesn't hold a candle to the fun of a marriage. Granted, as much work as a wedding is, it doesn't compare to the work of a marriage, either...though that work is its own kind of fun.

Since you met, six years ago and three thousand miles away, you've been building a life together. That life is sustained by the activities you both enjoy: hiking and camping, museums and concerts, books and travel. Of course, you have things in common beyond leisure activities. You value many of the same qualities in each other: trust and compassion, the ability to draw you away from your work and into the outdoors, an inclination towards good conversations.

This summer, each of you independently told me that you feel more able to be *yourself* with your partner than with anyone else in your life. That you don't have to pretend. That your partner loves you for who you are. That's an unbelievable gift, and more than anything else it's what will sustain you in this marriage for the rest of your lives. It means you're not afraid of each others' complexities or quirks. It means you're bringing your whole selves to the chuppah today, and to your lives which will unfold from here.

In Jewish tradition, the chuppah represents the home—and thus the life—that a couple will build together. There some beautiful symbolism in that. This chuppah is supported by four of your loved ones; just so, your home will be warm with the support of your community, your friends and family. This chuppah is open on all four sides; just so, your home will be open, as you are open, to new experiences and new people and new ideas. And this chuppah shelters the two of you from the elements; just so, your life together will shelter you from emotional storms. It may not keep out every drop of frustration or every gust of sorrow, but that's okay, because you have each other, and I can't think of any greater cause for joy.

Lisa Hoffman once wrote "Love is like pi—natural, irrational, and very important." Keren and Neal, my blessing for you on this day is that your love always be the most natural thing imaginable, your bedrock, as obvious as natural law; that your love always be completely irrational, heedless of reason, headlong and fun; and that your love always be as important to you as it is today, this very moment, right now.

## Ketubah

Yesterday, Keren and Neal signed their ketubah, the traditional Jewish wedding covenant. Their friend Julie will read the ketubah to you.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2004, at 55 Quarry Road in Lanesboro, Mass., Keren Witkin and Neal Freedman entered into a covenant of love before family and friends. In joining our lives together, we promise to honor, respect, and cherish one another in sickness and in health, in moments of sorrow and in times of joy. We shall be loving partners, faithful friends, and supportive companions.

Together, we will strive to fill our home with laughter and love, friends and family, tradition and celebration. May our hearts be open to an ever-deepening love and may our hands be quick to applaud and embrace. May our lips speak with clear and direct expression, our ears hear the sweet sound of encouragement, and may our eyes look only for the good in one another.

May we have the wisdom and patience, strength and devotion, health and happiness to enjoy many fulfilling years together.

## Vows

*[Rachel, then Neal, phrase by phrase]*

I, Neal, ask you, Keren, to be my wife  
To spend your days and nights with me  
and allow me to love and cherish you  
honor and respect you  
support and encourage you;

I promise to make you laugh  
and comfort you when you cry  
I promise to make your dreams my dreams  
and make your home my home;

I ask you to be my companion, lover and friend  
for better or for worse  
for richer, for poorer  
in sickness and in health  
for as long as we both shall live.

*[Rachel, then Keren, phrase by phrase]*

I, Keren, ask you, Neal, to be my husband  
To spend your days and nights with me  
and allow me to love and cherish you  
honor and respect you  
support and encourage you;

I promise to make you laugh  
and comfort you when you cry  
I promise to make your dreams my dreams  
and make your home my home;

I ask you to be my companion, lover and friend  
for better or for worse  
for richer, for poorer  
in sickness and in health  
for as long as we both shall live.

### **Rings**

To the naked eye, a ring is perfect and unbroken, without beginning or end. May the spirit of community created in our coming together today be equally perfect and unbroken, an endless source of joy in Neal and Keren's lives.

*[Keren followed by Neal, both prompted by Rachel, as ring is placed on the other's finger]*

I join my life with yours today without hesitation. I give this ring to you as a pledge of my abiding love and commitment.

### **Readings**

We have two more readings. First, Keren's grandmother Ruth will read an Apache wedding blessing, then Keren and Neal's friend Therese will read Pablo Neruda's Sonnet VIII.

*Apache Wedding Blessing*

Now you will feel no rain,  
for each of you will be shelter for the other.

Now you will feel no cold,  
for each of you will be warmth for the other.

Now there is no more loneliness.

Now you are two persons,  
but there is only one life before you.

May your days together be good and long  
upon the earth.

*Sonnet VIII, Neruda*

If your eyes were not the colour of the moon,  
A day full of clay, and work, and fire,  
If even held-in you did not move in agile grace like the air,  
if you were not an amber week

not the yellow moment  
when autumn climbs up through the vines  
if you were not that bread the fragrant moon  
kneads, sprinkling its flour across the sky,

O, my dearest, I would not love you so!  
But when I hold you I hold everything that is,  
Sand, time, the tree of the rain

Everything is alive so that I can be alive,  
Without moving I can see it all,  
In your life I see everything that lives.

**Excerpts from the Sheva Brachot:**

Jewish weddings are traditionally marked by the recitation of the *sheva brachot*, which sanctify creation, life, the coming-together of people in community, and the many joys with which we have been blessed, among them the particular joy of bridegroom and bride. Today we're using traditional Hebrew and an interpretive English translation.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

Blessed is the fruit of the vine.

*Baruch Atah, Adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, shehakol bara lichvodo.*

Blessed is the beautiful world in which we live.

*Baruch Atah, Adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, yotzer ha-adam.*

Blessed are all the living things in this world.

*Sos tasis v'tagel ha-akarah, b'kibbutz baneyah litocha b'simcha.*

Blessed is the joy of our gathering on this happy occasion.

*Sameach t'samach re'im ha-ahuvim, c'samech'cha y'tzirecha b'gan eden mikedem.*

May this union be filled with love, joy and pleasure.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, asher bara sason v'simcha, chatan v'kallah, gilah rinah, diza v'ched'vah, ahavah v'achava, v'shalom v're-ut, m'heyra Adonai eloheynu yishma b'arei y'hudah u'vchutzot y'rushalayim, kol sason v'kol simcha, kol chatan v'kol kallah, kol bitzhalot chatanim m'chupatam, un'arim mimsh'teh n'ginatam. Baruch atah, Adonai, m'sameach chatan im hakallah.*

Blessed is the creation of joy and celebration, lover and partner, pleasure and delight, love and solidarity, friendship and peace. Soon may we hear all around us the voice of joy, the voice of cheer, the triumphant voice of lovers from the chuppah, and their friends. Blessed is the joy of lovers, as they rejoice in each other.

And let us say together: Amen.

## **Closing**

*Yishru shalom, tovah uvrachah, heyn v'chesed v'rahamim beyneynu, beyn kol yoshvey teyveyl.*

May the blessings of peace and kindness, graciousness, goodness, and compassion, flow among us and all the peoples of the world.

## **Glass explanation**

In a moment, Neal and Keren will end their wedding ceremony with the Jewish tradition of smashing a glass. Explanations for this practice abound. Some say we break the glass in order that this marriage be as difficult to break apart as these shards would be to make whole again. Some say it's to remind us that even in our moments of greatest joy, somewhere in the world there is sorrow. Some say it's to scare away evil spirits, or to start off the marriage with a bang! Regardless, the appropriate response to the breaking glass is *mazal tov*, which means congratulations and good luck.

## **Announcement of the Couple**

It is my great honor and privilege to present to you the newly-married couple, Keren Witkin and Neal Freedman!

*[Neal/Keren break glass]*

*[Everyone shouts "mazal tov!"]*